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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to decrease the number of aggressive responses to conflict by fifth grade students. The goal was to increase student awareness of peaceful resolutions while decreasing the number of teacher interventions in student conflicts. To educate students on conflict resolution, the Community Board Curriculum for conflict resolution was employed, which was supplemented by other activities such as dramatic role playing. To measure the extent of the problem and the efficacy of the program, a frequency chart was used for observation as well as student self-reports and teacher questionnaires. Program results indicated a 23% decrease in physically aggressive responses and a 15% reduction in verbal aggression. The number of students who reported that they knew how to settle a conflict peacefully rose from 31 to 60 out of 83 respondents. No changes occurred in the number of teacher interventions which may have been due to the teachers' desire to be involved in any resolution as it relates to the classroom. Results indicate that conflict resolution programs are effective with elementary school students and that such programs do not need to be elaborate or lengthy to work. Six tables are included which summarize the data. Three appendices give samples of student and teacher questionnaires. (RJM)

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ED 370 031

# Decreasing Physical and Verbal Aggression in Fifth Grade Students Through Conflict Resolution Training

by

Joan R. Cassell

Cluster 51

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

1993

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May 9, 1994

Date of Final Approval of Report

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## Abstract

Decreasing Physical and Verbal Aggression in Fifth Grade Students Through Conflict Resolution Training. Cassell, Joan R., 1993: Practicum Report, Nova University ED. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Mediation/Conflict Resolution/Peace Education/Problem-solving.

This practicum was designed to decrease the number of aggressive responses to conflict, increase students' awareness of ways to achieve peaceful resolutions and decrease the number of teacher interventions in student conflict.

The writer used the Community Board Curriculum which included lessons on communication, feelings, and steps to the mediation process. the program was enriched through student written dramatic role plays and stories, as well as, art, debates and children's literature.

Upon completion of the implementation, analysis of the data revealed: a decrease in the number of physically and verbally aggressive responses by the students and an increase in the student's awareness of peaceful ways to resolve conflict. However, there was no change in the number o teacher interventions. The data was analyzed by comparing the measurement instruments before and after the implementation of the program. The instruments used were: observation frequency chart, student self-report, and teacher questionnaire.


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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## Description of Community

The writer works in a public elementary school located in the eastern mid-atlantic area. It is in an affluent suburban section of a major metropolitan city. The area is densely populated and includes single family homes, luxury townhomes, and apartments. There is a large community center and regional library less than one mile from the school. The area is home to many diplomats, foreign service and military families. Consequently, the area is fairly transient and culturally diverse.

## Writer's Worksetting and Role

There are many parent initiated functions for the students and faculty. Parents sponsor school wide fairs and classroom parties. Teachers are given luncheons and gifts at various times throughout the year. In many of the families the mother does not work outside the home. Most of the mothers that do work have a nanny in the home as their child's care giver. Many of the students live close enough to the school to walk and often the parents walk with them. Parent volunteers are in the building on a daily basis. It

is not unusual to see fathers volunteering for activities in the classrooms.

The school facility was recently renovated. Several classrooms were added allowing plenty of room for all of the programs offered. The school is bright and cheerful with lots of windows. The principal is new to the school this year, although not new to the school system. There are 29 faculty members which includes; classroom teachers, art, music, physical education, special education, social worker, psychologist, librarian, counselor, SACC program (before and after school care), occupational therapists, speech therapist, and principal. There are two full time and one part-time secretaries. There are four instructional aides and a part-time computer operations specialists.

There are 512 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. The student body is 77.9% white, 17% Asian, 3.7% Hispanic and 1.2% black. The females students account for 45.5% of the student body. While the males account for 54.5%. The number of retentions in 1991-92 was 2%. Attendance was at 95.4% on an average day during the same year. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch is 1.0% The mobility rate, which indicates the

percent of students leaving or entering school after the first day, was 15.3% for 1991-92.

The writer joined the faculty this year in October as the school counselor. The writer provides assistance to the students in social, emotional and academic areas, through individual and group counseling and classroom guidance activities. The counselor works closely with the principal, teachers and specialists to identify potential problems and initiate collective efforts to find a solution. Prior to this position, the writer was a counselor for eight years at a middle school within the same system. Before entering counseling, the writer taught physical education at the elementary and secondary level.

The writer has a B.A. in physical education and a M.Ed. in Guidance and counseling. The writer holds a professional certificate with endorsements in physical education k-12, guidance and counseling k-12, drivers education, health and safety k-12, and administration.

# CHAPTER II

# STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

## Problem Description

The situation dealt with the fifth grade students and their inability to exhibit appropriate responses to conflict. The students cannot communicate with their peers in a peaceful way when they are angry or upset with each other. The students use verbal or physical violence to solve their problems with their peers. The teachers must spend instructional time on these problems.

They have attempted to positively influence the students' behavior. They have initiated whole class and small group discussions on appropriate responses to conflict. The students have been referred to the counselor for guidance and to the principal for discipline. The teachers have also had parent conferences and kept the students in at recess. With all their efforts the problem still continued.

The problem was that the students could not communicate peacefully when in conflict situations. The teacher must spend instructional time on these problems.

## Problem Documentation

The problem was first brought forward by the teachers. The writer collected data to uncover the extent of the problem. The writer used a frequency chart for observation, student self-report, and teacher questionnaire. Systematic

observation of the playground and cafeteria using a frequency chart (see Appendix A) indicated a high number of occurrences of verbal and physical confrontations. More verbal aggression occurs in the cafeteria and more physical aggression occurs on the playground. Table 1 shows the frequency of verbal and physical aggressive behaviors observed during 5 observation sessions on the playground and the cafeteria.

Table 1

Frequency of Physical and Verbal Aggression

| Observation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Location | cafe. | play-ground | cafe. | play-ground | cafe |
| Verbal Aggression | 10 | 16 | 10 | 7 | 6 |
| Physical Aggression | 4 | 8 | 3 | 12 | 2 |

Students completed a self-report (see Appendix B). The results, shown in table 2, indicated that 42 out of 83 students felt that physical violence is sometimes necessary to solve problems. Also, 59 out of 83 students report that they engage in arguments everyday with someone. Only 31 out of 83 students feel that when faced with a conflict they can find a peaceful solution. Table 2 shows the number of

students responding Yes, No, and Not Sure for each item on the self-report.

Table 2 - Student Responses to Self-Report

| | | YES | NO | NOT SURE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I can explain the word conflict. | 17 | 46 | 20 |
| 2. | I usually know why I feel the way I do. | 9 | 53 | 21 |
| 3. | I get in an argument at least once a day. | 59 | 6 | 18 |
| 4. | I get along well with everyone in my class. | 33 | 22 | 28 |
| 5. | Sometimes physical violence is necessary to solve arguments. | 42 | 20 | 11 |
| 6. | I can usually express how I feel about something. | 19 | 42 | 22 |
| 7. | I am not the person who usually starts arguments in our classroom. | 19 | 23 | 43 |
| 8. | I know how to help people solve their problems. | 39 | 33 | 11 |
| 9. | I think world peace is possible. | 23 | 8 | 52 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. | I can explain the word mediation. | 2 | 77 | 4 |
| 11. | Our school is a peaceful place. | 42 | 28 | 13 |
| 12. | When people start arguments with me I know how to solve things peacefully. | 49 | 33 | 1 |

A questionnaire to teachers (see Appendix C) indicated that they must intervene at least once a day in student to student conflict. Table three shows the responses made by teachers on each of the items on the questionnaire.

Table 3 - Teacher Responses to Survey

| | | Number of Interventions | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 0 | 1 | 3-5 | >5 |
| 1. | I intervene in conflicts among my students. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| | | argue | blame | listen | compromise |
| 2. | When I do intervene in conflicts between my students they: | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Further documentation of the problem was reported in an interview with the principal. She indicated that all of the students in the school needed to work on their peer relations and specifically communication and problem-solving.

Causative Analysis

Conflict is a natural occurrence. It is inevitable that people will be in conflict situations on almost a daily basis. Adults are expected to have the necessary skills to handle interpersonal conflict in a positive way. We know that this is not the case. One need only watch the news on T.V. or read the local paper to confirm this. Violent crimes are committed daily by adults responding to conflict. Children in elementary school are not different. Adults often expect children to know how to respond to their peers
when faced with conflict. They are surprised that the children respond with verbal and physical aggression.

The fact is that it was not until the early 1980's that curriculum to teach the life skills necessary for positive conflict resolution was introduced. Earlier, behavioral scientist began to look at aggressive behaviors in children and to determine the cause. Certainly, educators agree that society in general is more violent today than fifteen years ago. The more current concern is violence in a once protected environment; the schools.

Children in the writer's setting are faced with many situations that can potentially cause conflict. The developmental needs of preadolescent children create these situations; need to belong to a group, need for a

confidante or best friend, frequent changes in alliance, need to assert independence, physical changes, increased interest in the opposite sex, and moral questioning.

Often preadolescent children cannot verbalize what they are thinking and feeling. This makes it difficult for them to acknowledge the thoughts and feelings of others. There responses are often self-gratifying. At the same time, preadolescent children can demonstrate a tremendous sense of what is just and fair. This is true of the children in the writer's work setting.

Other causes of aggressive student behavior in the writer's worksetting seem to center around the absence of knowledge and skills needed to resolve conflict positively. The children do not have a repertoire of options for responding to conflict. According to their self-report, the majority of the fifth grade students are not confident that they can solve a conflict peacefully.

## Relationship of the Problem to Literature

A review of the literature clearly indicates that our society has become increasingly violent. More frightening is the fact that violence in schools, including elementary schools, is increasing.

Aggressive behavior by students in the classroom is detrimental to everyone involved. All students learn less

because less time is spent in instruction. The teacher and the instruction are less effective due to the interruptions.

The prominent influences on violence in our schools revealed in the literature are; violence in our society, unregulated media, and inadequate teaching of appropriate responses to conflict.

The conduct and attitudes of society seem to present violence as a legitimate response to conflict. (Meek, 1992) For example, there has been a recent resurgence of racially motivated violence in our society. Many children have misconceptions and misunderstandings about races and cultures other than their own which causes them to respond aggressively when in conflict situations. (Banks, 1992)

The media seems to seek out violence to present to the American people through news, movies, T.V., and radio. Everyday the local and national news is filled with violence; murder, rape, terrorists attacks, kidnapping, child abuse, domestic quarrels, the list goes on and on. Movies and T.V. programs often promote as heros, people who use violence to resolve their conflicts. Radio D.J.'s often use verbal aggression in dealing with their listeners. Some of the music that our children are listening to glamorizes violence, racial bias, and even death. These are the sources of entertainment society provides for our children.

Eventhough parental discretion is advised, it is too often not used.

Cline (1977) carried out a study which indicated that children can be desensitized to violence through repeated observations of violent acts on television. Thus, a child may be less frightened by real violence and more prone to engage in violent behaviors.

According to Bandura (1977), children learn most of their social behaviors through deliberate or accidental imitation. They imitate family, sub-cultural groups, and what they see hear and read through the media. Continual exposure to violence causes children to develop a system of aggressive behavior. Clearly, the media presentation of violence has contributed to the increase in violence in our schools.

The worst elements of our society appear to have entered our education institutions with full force; suicide, drugs, prejudice, weapons, rape, cults and attacks on teachers. While our nation spent the past fifteen years struggling to control violence in society, it crept in to a place close to the heart of every mother and father; our schools. Now educators are searching for a cause and a solution. NEA President, Geiger (1993) has called for the involvement of local, state and federal governments to aide

schools in their quest for creating a safe environment. Likewise, America 2000 has as one of its goals that schools will be free of violence.

Although conflict in itself is not a bad thing, it has gotten a reputation for being undesirable. (Community Board, 1990) Conflict has brought about important changes that have benefited many people. The freedoms we enjoy today are a result of conflict. It is the human response to conflict that can make for undesirable situations.

Children are taught to read, write, and calculate math. Everyone agrees these things are important and necessary in our world. Lately, it has been brought to light that there are other very necessary skills that children need to have before entering the adult world. Having the necessary critical thinking skills to resolve conflict creatively is one of these skills. (Stuart 1991) Children functioning on all levels of cognitive and emotional maturity need these skills and are not getting them.

Unquestionably, violence in society in general, violence in the media, and inadequate instruction in peaceful conflict resolution, have all contributed to the increase in violence in our schools.

Another cause of aggressive behavior in children that was not mentioned frequently in the literature, but was of

interest to the writer, deals with language maturity. Piel (1990) and Shatles (1986) suggest that children with limited language skills use more physical aggression. Piel's study inicated that language maturity is a more significant factor in physically aggressive tendencies than sex or socioeconomic background. This certainly is worth considering when assessing needs and developing programs to reduce aggressive behavior in children. Shatles (1986) believes that the hostility that leads to physical aggression is caused by the inability of children to cope with their emotions. Children with more verbal skills use verbal aggression. Those whose language is immature resort to physical aggression.

# CHAPTER III

## ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

### Goals and Expectations

The following goals and outcomes were projected for this practicum: fifth grade students will be able to communicate with their peers peacefully when there is a problem and the teacher will not be responsible for students' behavior. The goal was achieved through the implementation of the Community Board Conflict Resolution Curriculum for the fifth grade students.

### Expected Outcomes

At the end of the implementation the expected changes would be; less verbal and physical violence, increased use of peaceful communication, and less time spent by teachers on conflict.

| END RESULT | EVALUATION TOOL | STANDARD OF ACHIEVEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| 1. less verbal and and physical violence | 1. observation frequency chart (Appendix A) | 1. 15% decrease in frequency |
| 2. increased use of peaceful communication | 2. student self report (Appendix B) | 2. !5% increase in positive responses to item 12 |
| 3. less teacher intervention | 3. teacher questionnaire (Appendix C) | 3. 15% decrease in frequency |

## Measurement of Outcomes

The incidents of physical and verbal aggression were to be assessed through observation by using a frequency chart (see Appendix A). This instrument was selected because it allowed the author to personally collect the information and the frequency chart provides measurable data. Using this instrument the author would be able to measure behavior in different environments and compare the results.

The increased use of peaceful communication would be assessed by student responses to a self-report. (see Appendix B) The students chose their responses from Yes, No, and Not Sure. The report would take approximately 15 minutes to administer to one class. The self-report was preferable to a pre and post test method because the interest of the author was in students feelings about themselves not in acquisition of specific knowledge. The self-report allowed the students to compare for themselves their changes in feelings after the program.

Teachers spending less time on conflict intervention would be assessed by a written teacher questionnaire (see Appendix C). The questionnaire asked the teachers to indicate how often they must intervene in student to student conflict in a days time. It was a very short 2 item questionnaire that will only take minutes to complete and evaluate. Simplicity was the issue for the author. The teachers were already overloaded and did not need another

lengthy form. This questionnaire was actually done orally; The writer asked the teachers, they answered and their responses were recorded.

# CHAPTER IV

## SOLUTION STRATEGIES

The problem addressed in this practicum was that fifth grade students could not communicate with their peers in a peaceful way when they were angry or upset with each other. The students used verbal or physical violence to solve their problems with their peers. The teacher had to spend instructional time on these problems which detracted from the learning process.

### Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

When faced with the need to eliminate aggressive behaviors, schools seem to be turning to conflict resolution programs. A review of the literature suggests that the implementation of any conflict resolution program decreases the occurrences of verbal and physical; aggression and increases peaceful communication in the program participants.

The literature revealed that many different curriculums and programs are being used in schools. All of them seem to incorporate similar components, in one form or another; teacher training, parent education and classroom training

for the students. All of the programs seem to be adaptable to the individual situation.

The underlying belief in all of the programs is that children have the capacity to learn to solve problems peacefully and that schools are the perfect arena in which to teach them. Schools have a captive audience for six hours a day. What better place to begin the quest for world peace; one school at a time, one child at a time.

Satchel (1992) and Jones (Personal Communication, January 21, 1993) both implemented conflict resolution programs to decrease discipline referral in their schools. Both programs included components for parents, teachers, and students. After one year, the results of implementing a conflict resolution program in both cases, were a decrease in discipline referrals.

The New York City Board of Education implemented a similar program to Satchel and Jones. It was called Resolving Conflict Creatively. The program was comprehensive and included classroom instruction for students in conflict resolution, a teacher training program, student mediators and classroom visits by experts. Metis Associates Inc. was contracted to evaluate the program. The standards of achievement were improvement in childrens'

attitudes and behaviors and a more peaceful school environment. The results, according to Metis Associates, Inc. (1990), indicated the program was successful.

A survey of New York city teachers found that 71% saw a reduction of physical violence in the classroom following conflict resolution training; 60% saw less name-calling and verbal putdowns; 61% saw increased student willingness to cooperate with each other; and 72% noticed students had improved their ability to understand other points of view. (Meek, 1992)

A similar conflict resolution program was implemented by Ehler (1991) a middle school principal. The difference between Ehler, Satchel, Jones and the New York City program is reason for concern. Ehler was concerned with the use of instructional time being spent on conflicts. According to Ehler, students in her school were taught that they need adults to resolve their conflicts. The staff wanted to empower the students to resolve and manage their own conflict. The hope was that a conflict resolution program would increase time for teaching, create a more peaceful school climate, and give children skills for positive resolution of problems in their own life.

The results showed that referrals for sixth grade students dropped from 38.5% to 17.5% by the end of the

school year. All office referrals for grades six, seven, and eight were down by 52% and student to student conflicts have been reduced by 76%. By decreasing the frequency of aggressive behaviors the teachers were able to spend more time on instruction.

Shatles (1986) has a conceptually similar approach as those already mentioned. The components are different and the procedures are more specific. The focus is totally on the children. There is no parent education or teacher training included in the program. The four concepts for peace education suggested by Shatles are; affirmation, communication, cooperation and conflict resolution.

Shatles refers to affirmation as the process of allowing children the opportunity to express who they are and to be accepted. As for communication, Shatles feels that children need to be given more time to spend in conversation with each other so they can learn how to communicate. Cooperation is taught by involving children in activities where they need to work together. Shatles idea about teaching conflict resolution is for adults to take the time to help children solve their problems. Another special component of the program is referred to as reading - writing- peace - connection. Shatles suggests using literature to present the four concepts of her program. The

writer was unable to find any qualitative or quantitative data to support the effectiveness of Shatle's program.

Landon (1993) discusses another New York City program called Effective Alternatives in Reconciliation Services. Unlike the conflict resolution programs previously mentioned, this is a more structured mediation service that is aimed at reducing racial tensions by providing a peaceful forum to vent anger and hostility. The program is not a traditional education program but works much like labor union negotiations. The emphasis is on peaceful verbal expression of concerns as a replacement for violence.

More than 2000 mediation programs are in schools across the United States. All of them report success in promoting positive behaviors in students. (Meek, 1992) The programs vary from school to school as educators make adaptations for their particular setting and use their own creativity to generate new and exciting activities.

Recent literature reveals many new ideas and concepts that enhance existing programs. Chetkow-Yanoov (1992) suggests that conflict resolution curriculum should include; knowledge about diversity, understanding the influence of attitudes, and the dynamics of power and conflict. With an increase in racial and cultural conflict, these ideas can give added dimensions to conflict resolution.

Rifkin (1991) makes a suggestion that will improve any conflict resolution program. That is, a system for transferring the learned skills into real life. Most of the curriculums reviewed included role play and practice. However, Rifkin takes it a step further, suggesting a system be in place to allow for making connections to what is really going on in the child's life. The writer sees this as an individual process. Children bring different emotional baggage with them. Not all connections will work for all children. For example, a child who is being physically abused at home will be less likely to connect with peacefully resolving conflicts with parents than a child who is not being abused.

Landon (1990) suggests that in order to actually make positive changes in student behavior visible consequences need to be given to students who exhibit aggressive behaviors. He feels this needs to be done in conjunction with a conflict resolution program. Visible punishment for aggressive behavior will be a deterrent for students. The children will then choose from the alternatives to aggression they learn in the conflict resolution curriculum. This idea finds support from Glasser and his theory of reality therapy. His theory suggests that children respond

to logical consequence for their behavior. (Hansen, Stevic, & Warner, 1977)

Rogers and Ross (1986) suggest a strategy that uses the currently popular cooperative learning technique. Their suggestion is to group children with inappropriate social skills with children who have appropriate social skills when teaching conflict resolution. This suggestion compliments Shatler's (1986) idea of teaching cooperation through group problem-solving. The strategy is rooted to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. His theory suggests that children learn their behaviors from modeling. Then in theory, grouping children who need to learn appropriate behavior with those who have already learned and are demonstrating the desired behaviors is an effective strategy.

The literature implies that any attempts at peace education, regardless of the curriculum or activities used, will have some degree of positive effect on decreasing verbal and physical aggression in schools.

Landon (1993) believes visible consequences for inappropriate behavior will help to promote positive behavior in children. The writer believes that visible rewards for positive behaviors is also important. The

writer suggests honoring students and teachers who have done things in the school or community to promote peace.

Shatles (1986) suggests that literature can be used to teach the four components of her conflict resolution program; affirmation, cooperation, conflict resolution, and communication. Chetkov-Yanoov (1992) suggests that conflict resolution curriculum should include knowledge about diversity and understanding the influence of attitudes. Why not combine the use of literature with issues of diversity and attitudes. Using age appropriate literature can make these complex topics easier to understand and relate them to the students' real life experiences.

Literature and art are wonderful forms of expression for everyone. Children love to draw, paint and write about their world. A peace journal containing student art and writing can bring an added dimension to peace education for children.

Children enjoy role playing and pretending. Why not capitalize on their desire to be the center of attention and have them create peace plays that show other children how to solve problems they may encounter. Another variation on this could be the reenactment of situations in the lives of famous peacekeepers.

Since adults have not been very successful in bringing about world peace, why not give the children an opportunity. Using a mini United Nations forum, students can research different countries and leaders and come together to try and solve world problems through negotiations.

When schools decide to address verbal and physical aggression they usually choose some form of conflict resolution program. Most programs include a teacher training component, student curriculum, and parent education. This standard model appears to be very successful. The programs lend themselves to adaptations for individual schools. This makes them very useable. Also, these programs are flexible and allow for creativity; newly generated ideas can easily be added.

All of the conflict resolution programs described in this paper would be feasible in the writer's work setting. The writer was most intrigued by the conflict resolution model created by Shatler (1986). The idea of using literature to present material is a familiar technique to the writer. Shatler's concepts were very student-centered and were postured much like counseling activities.

The New York City Program, Effective Alternatives in

Reconciliation Services is least desirable for the writer's setting. While it is a good program for a culturally diverse older student population, it would not be as effective in a predominantly white elementary school.

The writer believes the related ideas are all excellent and would benefit any type of program. Of particular interest to the writer is the idea of providing for the transference of learned conflict resolution skills into real life. (Rifkin, 1991) This is a most important component that often does not get the attention it deserves. Children need to see relevance in what they are taught before it can become part of their daily life.

Also useful in promoting transference is the idea of grouping together children who need to learn appropriate social behavior and those who have already learned and are demonstrating the desired behavior. The writer believes that seeing and modeling desirable behaviors enables children to make the transference from cognitive learning to behavioral tasks.

The writer agrees with Landon (1993) that visible consequences for inappropriate behaviors can be beneficial in reducing physical and verbal aggression. However, the writer intended to focus on the positive behaviors. Also, it is was not within the writer's job description to

initiate consequences for inappropriate behavior in the school.

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

The writer used the Community Board Curriculum for conflict resolution, adding other activities to supplement the program. The program included 24 half hour lessons on conflict resolution. Additional activities included; student written and performed dramatic role-plays, using literature and student art to promote the program, an opportunity for students to attend a county-wide conflict resolution conference, after school practice in mediation, a presentation to the PTA on the conflict resolution process.

In order to put the solution into effect, the writer arranged class time with the fifth grade teachers for the lessons and gathered materials and supplies needed to present the lessons and activities. The writer used the Community Board Curriculum which had already been acquired. The supplies for specific activities came from general school supplies. Since conflict resolution is considered an acceptable unit of the elementary counseling program and the

Community Board Curriculum is on the county approved list of materials, no special permission was needed. The writer has a large room designated as the counseling room that is conducive to group work, plays or art projects.

During the implementation of the solution the writer worked with all of the students in the school using the age-appropriate lessons from the Community Board Curriculum. Data was only collected from the fifth grade. The writer also provided activities to all classroom teachers to supplement the units being taught in the program.

Report of Action Taken

The following procedures show the sequence of events for implementation. During the first week of implementation a short inservice was given to teachers to familiarize them with conflict resolution and the writer's goals for the students. The writer used statistics from the local school district revealing the incidents of violence with and without weapons. After the teacher inservice, the lessons began in the classrooms. As previously mentioned, the curriculum used was from The Community Board. The teachers were not responsible for any preparation or record keeping. Although, teachers were encouraged to stay with the class and participate, they could use the time for planning or preparing their own lessons.

The students in the fifth grade classes had previously completed a self-report on their peace making abilities. This foreshadowing of what they were going to learn made them enthusiastic participants. For the next twelve weeks the students were presented one lesson each week from the Community Board Curriculum. Each class lasted approximately 45 minutes. The lessons and activities were selected to match the needs of the students. Every lesson included opportunities for role-playing peaceful solutions to conflict situations.

The first three lessons focused on understanding conflict including: personal, local and global causes of conflict and how conflict can be a positive force when used to bring about needed changes. Lesson four explored some of the common responses that people have to conflict and the pros and cons of using the different responses. The responses to conflict were generated by the students and included: ignoring, confrontation, and denial. Lessons five through nine concentrated on communication skills including: I-messages, active listening and feelings behind the words. In lesson ten the students were presented a method for problem-solving using peer mediation. The students used a five-step process to help mediate peer conflicts and bring them to a peaceful resolution. The steps were: introductions, getting the facts, defining the

problem, finding solutions and closure of agreements. Lessons eleven and twelve provided an opportunity for the students to practice these techniques through role-play. The students used conflicts from their own lives as role-play scenarios.

The author supplemented the curriculum with other activities, based on student choice. During the second week, the author, with the help of students, assembled a peace showcase that included photographs, art, poetry and symbols of peace with explanations of their relevance to peace in our world. This was a hands-on display that included a peace sign necklace from the sixties, photographs of JFK, Martin Luther King Jr. and Ghandi, as well as student art. Students could add items at anytime as long as they could relate the relevance of the item to peace.

Throughout the twelve weeks, students were given the opportunity to express their feelings about conflict and peace through art and writing. The author collected students' drawings, poetry and stories that could be made into a peace journal for the next school year.

Students had the opportunity to attend a countywide mediation conference for over 800 students in grades 4 through 12. This was a wonderful experience for them to see the magnitude of the program. At the conference students

attended 4 workshops of their choice and they had time to discuss and compare their program with other students.

About halfway through the implementation the P.T.A. was invited to a presentation by the students engaged in the program. The students described the mediation process and gave a role-play demonstration. This gave the parents an opportunity to become familiar with the process.

Throughout the entire program interested students were given the opportunity to practice at length what they learned. This was done during recess, lunch and after school. Near the end of the program the students were using this time to mediate actual disputes that occurred during the day. Teachers were given a schedule so they knew when mediators were available. They were allowed to send any students who agreed to mediation to the counseling room during the designated times. This helped other students become familiar with the process by being on the disputant end.

At the end of the implementation the 5th grade students completed the self-report (see Appendix A) again. They had the opportunity to compare it to their first self-report and reflect on their progress. The results of all of the data; self-reports, teacher questionnaires, and observations, was given to all of the teachers and the administration. The results were also made available to parents.

# CHAPTER V

# RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Results

The problem addressed dealt with fifth grade students and their inability to respond appropriately to conflict. The students were not able to communicate with their peers in a peaceful way when they were angry. Instead, the students used verbal or physical aggression to respond to problems with their peers. This caused the teachers to spend instructional time on student conflict situations.

The author selected the Community Board Curriculum for conflict resolution, adding other activities to supplement the program. Additional activities included; dramatic role play, an opportunity for students to attend a county wide conflict resolution conference, extra opportunities to practice mediation, and a presentation to the PTA on conflict resolution.

The goal of the program was to decrease physical and verbal aggression used by fifth grade students as their response to conflict situations.

The first anticipated outcome was a 15% decrease in physical and verbal aggression measured by using an

observation frequency chart. (see Appendix A) The results indicated a 23% decrease in physically aggressive responses and a 15% decrease in verbally aggressive responses. Table 4 shows the total number of responses that used physical aggression and the total number of responses that used verbal aggression that occurred during 5 separate observations in the cafeteria and the playground . The number of responses before the implementation to the program is compared to number of responses near the conclusion of the program.

Table 4

Frequency of Responses Using Physical and Verbal Aggression Before and After the Implementation of the Conflict Resolution Program.

| | Before | After |
|---|---|---|
| Verbal Aggression | 49 | 34 |
| Physical Aggression | 29 | 6 |

The second anticipated outcome was a 15% increase in the number of positive responses to question 12 on the student self-report. (see Appendix B) Students completed the self-report before and after the implementation of the conflict resolution program. Before the implementation of the program only 31 out of 83 responded positively to item 12 on the self-report, that is, only 31 students felt that

when faced with a conflict they would be able to find a peaceful solution. After the program 60 students responded positively to item number 12. This is a 49% increase in positive responses. (see Table 5)

Table 5

Total Number of Positive Responses Before and After the Implementation of the Conflict Resolution Program

| | Before | After |
|---|---|---|
| 12. When people start arguments with me I know how to solve things peacefully. | 31 | 60 |

The third anticipated outcome was a 15% decrease in teacher intervention in student conflicts. A questionnaire to teachers (see Appendix C) to teachers indicated they had to intervene at least once a day in student to student conflict before the implementation of the conflict resolution program. Table 6 shows the total number of teacher interventions per day before and after the implementation of the program. The table indicates that there was no change in the number of teacher interventions.

Table 6

Total Number of Teacher Interventions

| | Number of Interventions | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frequency | 0 | 1 | 3-5 | >5 |
| Before | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| After | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |

## Discussion and Implications

The implementation of the conflict resolution program was successful at reducing the number of aggressive verbal and physical responses by the students. The program was also successful in increasing the number of students who believe they can solve conflicts peacefully. The anticipated outcomes for both of these was met or surpassed.

However, the program was not successful in decreasing the number of teacher interventions in student conflict. The author believes that the dedication of the teachers was significant in the failure to decrease the number of interventions. The teachers feel strongly that students need to learn to solve their problems and they feel it is their responsibility to encourage this in their students. Therefore, eventhough the students are more aware of using a process to resolve conflict peacefully, teachers will still want to be involved in the process as it relates to the classroom setting.

The success of the program has significant implications for education in terms of introducing conflict resolution into the elementary school. The implication is that conflict resolution programs do work and elementary students can understand the concepts involved. Some teachers may be skeptical that elementary children have the intellectual ability to understand the process of mediation and the concept of compromise, not to mention the ability to put the process into action in terms of changing their behavior.

The author has always believed that elementary students have an intense sense of justice and fair play. Teaching a process of resolving conflict peacefully allows these students to put their beliefs into practice.

The second implication is that a conflict resolution program need not be elaborate in order to be effective in changing student behavior. The author kept the implementation simple in response to the needs of the students and time limitations.

The curriculum selected was a ready-made product that had already been proven successful. The activities fit into the time frames available, used a variety of techniques, and accommodated different learning styles. Even though the program was enriched through drama, art and literature, the basic component of the program was the actual process of

peer conflict resolution. Once the students learned the process they wanted to use their time to practice their skills.

The third implication is that programs in conflict resolution need not have a lengthy duration to be effective. The author had a 3 month implementation time. During this time students met 2 or 3 times a week for one half hour. Some of the students chose to come in during their break and practice, however, most students kept to the prearranged schedule.

In spite of the time constraints the students were able to learn the process and demonstrate a range of proficiency in using it. Even the least proficient student understood the terms mediation and conflict resolution and were able to list the 5 steps in the process. There were other students who were able to explain each step and mediate peer conflicts with definite expertise.

Another implication that surfaced during the implementation is that when students see how a conflict resolution program fits into their world it becomes much more significant to them.

Throughout the implementation of the program the students showed an interest in this new concept that peaked and waned. The author explained to the students that many

schools in the area had already implemented programs and that this program was one small step toward world peace.

It was not until 10 of the students were able to attend a county-wide Mediation Conference along with 800 other elementary and middle-school students that the magnitude of this program was realized. After the conference, those 10 students returned to school with such enthusiasm that they were able to light a fire under the others. The conference brought the program into their own world - their own reality.

## Summary

The resulting outcomes indicate that teaching students a process for peaceful resolution of their conflict will result in a decrease in responses that are physically or verbally aggressive and improve their understanding of the process of resolving conflict. To make an impact the program need not be complex or long in duration. More important would be providing opportunities for making connections between theory and practice; between concept and reality.

## Recommendations

After contemplating the implementation of the program the author has the following recommendations:

1. Learn from others. Before beginning any conflict

resolution program look around to see what has already been done successfully and use it.

2. Check your expectations. Allow students opportunities to participate at their own comfort level. The process will not come easy to all students. Especially those who live on a daily basis with conflict that is resolved through violence.

3. Start small and tread lightly. Many teachers already feel the pressure of an overcrowded curriculum and students being pulled from their classes for various activities. A small easy to handle endeavor will produce results and the program will sell itself.

Continuation and Dissemination of the Program

To further the conflict resolution program the author will continue mediation training at each grade level. Students with special interest will be given an opportunity to mediate peer conflicts on an as needed basis. Students will be given opportunities to participate in pyramid and county-wide conflict resolution activities. Teachers will be provided opportunities for training and interaction with students. Using conflict resolution in the family will be the theme of presentations offered as an adjunct for parenting classes.

The author intends to share the practicum results with the principal and staff within the school and within the pyramid. Also the results will be shared with the Area Superintendent, OSAP - Office of Substance Abuse Prevention and the newly formed Office for Conflict Resolution.

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Appendix A

OBSERVATION CHART

One mark (/) indicates one observed occurance of the behavior.

**FREQUENCY CHART FOR PHYSICAL AND VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS**

**DATE** _____

**lOCATION** _____

**VERBAL FREQUENCY** _____

PHYSICAL FREQUENCY _____

Appendix B

STUDENT SELF-REPORT

INDICATE YOUR CHOICE BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

1. I can explain the word conflict.

   YES NO NOT SURE

2. I usually know why I feel the way I do.

   YES NO NOT SURE

3. I get in an argument at least once a day.

   YES NO NOT SURE

4. I get along well with everyone in my class.

   YES NO NOT SURE

5. Sometimes physical violence is necessary to solve arguments.

   YES NO NOT SURE

6. I can usually express how I feel about something.

   YES NO NOT SURE

7. I am not the person who usually starts arguments in our classroom.

   YES NO NOT SURE

8. I know how to help people solve their problems.

   YES NO NOT SURE

9. I think world peace is possible.

   YES NO NOT SURE

10. I can explain the term mediation.

    YES NO NOT SURE

11. Our school is a peaceful place.

YES NO NOT SURE

12. When people start arguments with me I know how to solve things peacefully.

YES NO NOT SURE

Appendix C

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Indicate your choice by circling the appropriate letter next to the statement you select.

1. I intervene in conflicts between my students:

   A. not at all

   B. at least once a day

   C. 3 to 5 times a day

   D. more than 5 times a day

2. When I do intervene in conflicts between my students they react by:

   A. arguing

   B. blaming others

   C. listening to each other

   D. making an effort to compromise